



Appropriately Indian: Gender and Culture in a New Transnational Class

Smitha Radhakrishnan

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Appropriately Indian is an ethnographic analysis of the class of information technology professionals at the symbolic helm of globalizing India. Comprising a small but prestigious segment of India's labor force, these transnational knowledge workers dominate the country's economic and cultural scene, as do their notions of what it means to be Indian. Drawing on the stories of Indian professionals in Mumbai, Bangalore, Silicon Valley, and South Africa, Smitha Radhakrishnan explains how these high-tech workers create a "global Indianness" by transforming the diversity of Indian cultural practices into a generic, mobile set of "Indian" norms. Female information technology professionals are particularly influential. By reconfiguring notions of respectable femininity and the "good" Indian family, they are reshaping ideas about what it means to be Indian.

Radhakrishnan explains how this transnational class creates an Indian culture that is self-consciously distinct from Western culture, yet compatible with Western cosmopolitan lifestyles. She describes the material and symbolic privileges that accrue to India's high-tech workers, who often claim ordinary middle-class backgrounds, but are overwhelmingly urban and upper caste. They are also distinctly apolitical and individualistic. Members of this elite class practice a decontextualized version of Hinduism, and they absorb the ideas and values that circulate through both Indian and non-Indian multinational corporations. Ultimately, though, global Indianness is rooted and configured in the gendered sphere of home and family.

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